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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5430

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE

RUEHAK/TSR ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

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RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// IMMEDIATE

RHMFSS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU IMMEDIATE

RHMCSUU/SACEUR POLAD SHAPE BE IMMEDIATE

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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000403

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TAGS: MOPS PREL PGOV TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: TGS ANNOUNCES WITHDRAWAL OF GROUND TROOPS
FROM NORTHERN IRAQ

The Turkish General Staff (TGS) announced the withdrawal of its ground troops from northern Iraq, which began February 29, in a statement released on February 29. The statement stressed that the troops are being withdrawn because their mission has been completed, not because of external pressure. Informal Embassy translation of the TGS statement follows.

Begin Text:

Turkish Armed Forces launched an air-supported land operation (with the participation of Land Forces Command and Jandarma General Command) against the PKK/KONGRA-Gel terrorist organization into northern Iraq at 1900 on February 21, 2008 - the most convenient time by taking issues such as weather conditions and daylight into consideration.

Carrying out the operation in a season with adverse weather conditions was especially preferable for suppressing the terrorists' capabilities and in order to benefit from the capability of the Turkish Armed Forces which can carry out its duty under any condition. Furthermore, due to the conditions, terrorists have not been able to use explosives due to the deep snow, and consequently they could not cause any casualties.

The operation aimed at neutralization of terrorists in the region and destruction of the organization's physical infrastructure. The Zap region was targeted as the main base of the organization from a geographical point of view.

The operation was commanded by the 2nd Army Command in Sirnak and was implemented by the Jandarma Public Peace Corps Command in Cukurca.

Air support to the operation was provided by the 2nd Air Force Command, while the army aviation and artillery support were provided by Land Forces based close to the border. Terrorist positions located in the deep parts and their shelters were struck by air forces and air support land vehicles.

Our units have successfully carried out the operation across the border in the mountainous areas with deep snow and harsh cold weather conditions. The units consisted of commando trained infantry and flying units, while tank, armored, and wheeled vehicles were used in the operation.

The weather varied from 0-5 in the daytime and between 0 to -15 at night. The snow was 0-45cm in valleys and 1-1.5 meters in high areas. There were intense fog and snowstorms in the region on February 25 and 26.

Only the PKK terrorist organization was targeted, the civilian population and local elements have not been affected in the cross-border operation.

The excellent coordination between Land Forces, Jandarma, and Air Force elements made the implementation of a cross-border operation to be considered as a paragon of joint operations.

Air strikes were carried out against 60 target groups (272 targets) during the operation, while 517 different targets were hit by the Land Forces fire support vehicles. 126 caves, 290 shelters, 12 command centers, 11 communication facilities, six training facilities, 23 logistics facilities, 18 transportation facilities, 40 light weapon positions and 59 anti-aircraft positions were partially or entirely destroyed since the beginning of the operation.

Along with the three captured terrorists yesterday, a total of 240 terrorists were neutralized during the cross-border operations.

27 security personnel (24 military personnel and three

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village guards) were martyred in the operations. The majority of about 300 terrorists, who were identified in the region before the operation, were neutralized while the rest could not be contacted after they left the region. Moreover, shelter facilities, communication equipment, anti-aircraft positions, and life materials were considerably destroyed in the region. Therefore, the initial goal of the operation is assessed to have been achieved. After the field searching activities carried out by our units, our units started returning to the bases in our country as of the morning of February 29, 2008.

It is obvious that a terrorist organization cannot be eliminated with an operation carried in the region. However, it is shown that northern Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists anymore.

It is evaluated that the carried out operation will prevent the usage of the region as a permanent and safe base by the terrorists and will contribute to the stability and internal peace of Iraq in the long term.

The timing of the operation (when to start and when to complete it) is determined by us solely in line with the military needs and necessities. Turkish Armed Forces has not been affected by any internal or external forces in making this decision. Moreover, when these types of reports were released, some of our units which had participated in the operation had already been withdrawn to our borders in line with the plans.

We will continue tracking the activities of the terrorist organization in northern Iraq. We will not allow any threat coming against us from that region. The fight against terrorism will continue with determination both inside and outside the country.

Those who have joined the organization - regardless of their reason - are expected to seek the kindness and justice of the state as they find out they will not be able to achieve anything by shedding blood.

The public will be separately informed after the evaluation of the detailed reports from the region.

End Text.

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